

LESSON PLAN

HISTORY UNFOLDED

US NEWSPAPERS AND THE HOLOCAUST

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

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HISTORY UNFOLDED

US NEWSPAPERS AND THE HOLOCAUST

GRADE LEVEL

9–12

SUBJECT AREAS

- History and Social Studies > US History
- History and Social Studies > World History
- English and Language Arts > Journalism
- English and Language Arts > Media Literacy

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- English Language Arts: Reading Informational Texts
1, 6, 7
- History/Social Studies
1, 2, 3, 7, 9

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson is designed to help students better understand American responses to the Holocaust within the socio-economic and political context of the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. It promotes historical thinking and media literacy skills through research and analysis of primary source documents (i.e., historical newspapers) on microfilm or in digitized collections. In most cases, this lesson will require students to perform research at local libraries or historical societies. In some cases, digitized collections may be accessible online. The lesson will take two to three class periods, which include:

- **Day One:** Students assess their knowledge and assumptions about Americans and the Holocaust. They develop background knowledge about specific Holocaust-related events, and they prepare for their research.
- **Day Two:** Students perform primary source research either online or at a local library or archive. They record their discoveries.
- **Day Three:** Students record and analyze the articles they uncovered. They submit their findings to the History Unfolded website and discuss the research process and their findings with the class. The class discusses what they have learned about their local community in the larger context of American responses to the Holocaust in the 1930s and 1940s.

RATIONALE

While it took place in Europe, the Holocaust is also an American story. Many newspapers reported on events in Europe, and broad segments of the American public knew of the threats of Nazism, but such awareness seldom translated into action to help Europe's endangered Jews. Americans' responses were shaped by competing factors, such as isolationism, prejudice, economic uncertainty, and national security concerns. This lesson challenges students to consider how such factors influenced the "newsworthiness" of Holocaust-related events, as well as how news of the Holocaust was presented to American readers.

TIME

Two to three class periods. (Adaptable from two 45-minute class periods up to three 80-minute "blocks.")

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Identify, closely read, and analyze newspaper articles to determine what information was available to Americans about the threat of Nazism, the persecution of Jews before the war, and the systematic murder of Jews during the war, as well as how Americans responded to that information.
2. Identify political, social, and economic pressures and conflicting motivations, which may have influenced local news reporting about the Holocaust during the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., the Great Depression, the New Deal, fear of Communism, native racism and antisemitism, isolationism, and anti-immigration sentiment).
3. Compare and contrast placement and prominence of their assigned article with other news items in their local paper.

4. Evaluate the importance of headlines, article placement, and vocabulary used by newspapers to inform readers about the Holocaust.
5. Based on available evidence, draw conclusions about what members of their local community may have known about the Holocaust and how this could have influenced their responses to it.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

Handouts

- Student packets
- Short historical overview on “US Newspapers and the Holocaust”

Online Content

- [Event descriptions](#) provide background information, search keywords, and key dates for the topics students will research

Technology

- At least one computer with Internet access is required for this lesson
- Mobile devices (phones, tablets, or cameras) for students to capture digital images, if performing microfilm research

PREPARATION

1. **Review** the following online resources:
 - [The History Unfolded project website](#)
 - [The United States and the Holocaust \(a short historical overview\)](#)
 - [United States Policy and Its Impact on European Jews \(a short historical overview\)](#)
 - [A short audio interview with Professor Laurel Leff on the New York Times’ coverage of the Holocaust](#)
2. **Identify newspapers** that were published in or near your community in the 1930s and 1940s and locate collections that you and your students may access. If there are no library or archive collections in your vicinity, consider using [online digital collections](#) for student research.
3. **Create user profiles** for you and your students on the History Unfolded website, and **create a group** for your class. Make sure your students have joined the class group. This will allow you to monitor their work.
4. **Based on class size**, student interest, and curricular focus, select a subset of [events](#) from the History Unfolded website for your students to research.
5. **Print out the student packets** (one per student) and [information](#) for the events you selected (one set per group). The website provides background information, keywords, and suggested date ranges to frame research. Students also may access the event pages online if preferred.
6. **Plan ahead** if students will be using microfilm holdings at a local library or archive.
7. **Familiarize yourself with best practices** for newspaper research:
 - Determine the frequency and timing of your newspaper’s publication cycle (daily, weekly, evening, etc.)
 - Taking the publication cycle into consideration, determine the appropriate time window to search within
 - Articles about Holocaust-related events often appeared on inside pages of newspapers. Frequently, they were small articles or even appeared within larger articles on related topics. Therefore, carefully examine all pages of the newspaper
 - Use appropriate keywords for your search and, if you are performing an online search, consider combinations of keywords
 - Do not rely solely on keyword searches, which can miss terms and concepts; if you know that an event happened on a specific date, scan through articles in the next day’s paper for news of the event

PROCESS

DAY ONE

Introduction: 10–15 minutes*

1. **Arrange students** in small groups of three to four.
2. **Ask students**, “What do you think Americans knew about the events now known as the Holocaust while it was happening?”
3. **In groups, students read the handout** “US Newspapers and the Holocaust” and discuss how it influences their perspectives on Americans and the Holocaust. Allow groups to share in response to the handout.

**If you are teaching this lesson outside the context of a larger unit on the Holocaust, you may want to conduct a brief diagnostic assessment of student’s prior knowledge of the Holocaust, and define the Holocaust for your students.*

Lesson: 25–55 minutes

1. **Explain to students** that they will be assuming the role of amateur historians investigating what their local community knew about events during the time of the Holocaust. Their research will be part of an online national database and may appear in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s upcoming exhibition on Americans and the Holocaust. It will contribute to the Museum’s data collection, and it will help scholars to better understand the information available to Americans during the Holocaust.
2. **Distribute student packets** and ask students to assign themselves roles within their groups: Researcher, Analyst, Recorder, Reporter (student packet, page 1).
3. **Assign students** at least one specific event** to focus their research.
4. **Using page four** of the student packet and the **information** for their assigned event(s), students should:
 - a) Read about their event
 - b) Create a list of keywords and research questions and consider challenges they might face in their research
 - c) Make predictions about what they expect to find in media coverage of their event(s)

***If you have time and/or high-ability students, this activity may be expanded to include more than one event per group. Several events are directly related to the Holocaust; however, many events also illustrate the socio-economic and political pressures that would have influenced American responses to the Holocaust (e.g., economic uncertainty, isolationism, antisemitism, fear of Communism, anti-immigration sentiment, etc.). If possible, assign each group an event from the Holocaust, as well as one that conveys the American context.*

Close: 10 minutes

1. **Ask each group to summarize their assigned event(s)** and share their predictions for coverage they will find related to the event(s).
2. **Allow students to share challenges** they anticipate they will encounter during research. Offer guidance, when possible, in overcoming the challenges.

DAY TWO (OPTION A)

OFF-SITE RESEARCH

When taking students to a library or archive to do research using microfilm, it is often easier to do so in small groups and thus should be done after school or sometime before “Day Three” of the lesson, which will then take the place of “Day Two.” Additionally, if short on time, a research demonstration can be built into the end of “Day One” and researchers can complete the task for homework before “Day Three.” The demonstration should include guidance to researchers on [how to use microfilm readers](#), how to record article content using the data collection form (see Student Packet), and best practices for using a mobile device to photograph a full-page and close-up of the article. In the event that students discover a political cartoon, the National Archives provides a useful [worksheet for cartoon interpretation](#). To better understand typical print newspaper layout and structure, students may also view the “[How to Read Newspapers from the 1930s and 1940s](#)” tutorial.

DAY TWO (OPTION B)

CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Introduction: 10 minutes

1. **In groups**, students review the previous day’s work; focus on key dates, terms, and research questions.
2. **Ask students to view and discuss** the brief tutorial “[How to Read Newspapers from the 1930s and 1940s](#)” on the History Unfolded website.

Lesson: 25–55 minutes

1. **Demonstrate the research process** with an [unassigned event](#) from the History Unfolded website. Use the background information, keywords, and date ranges from one of the event overview pages to model research best practices. Note: You may use the article from the *Toledo Blade* provided in the Student Packet (pages 8–9) and the event information for Rabbi Stephen Wise’s speech for this demonstration.
2. **Identify the [online collections](#)** you will be using, and in groups students begin research using online database(s).
3. **When they locate an article**, students may make a screen capture or take a photo including a full-page image (showing page location and date) and a close-up (showing actual article text). If the article spans multiple pages, this technique should be repeated for each included page. There may also be more than one article on a topic over a series of days.

Close: 10 minutes

1. **Ask each group to share** their challenges and successes with the research process.
 - o Did they find material related to their topics? If so, what? If not, what was going on in your community that the newspaper editors thought was important?
 - o What did you learn from the research process?
2. **Remind students** that further analysis will take place tomorrow during class.
3. **Collect and prepare** all articles for analysis on Day Three.*

* Consider how students will analyze what they have found. Will they review articles presented in an electronic format (e.g., Did they save digital files of articles they found?) or will they use print copies? If the former, do you need them to e-mail copies to you? How will they be displayed? If the latter, ensure that you or they have printed out copies of their articles in advance of class on Day Three.

DAY THREE

ANALYSIS

Introduction: 10 minutes

1. **In groups, review the article(s)** collected the previous day. If students performed research offsite at a library or archive, they should briefly share their experiences with the group. If one group has multiple articles and another group has none, the teacher can re-allocate articles so that each group has an article to analyze, but also ask groups to reflect on their originally assigned piece and their predictions related to the success of their research. (student packet, page 2)
2. **Demonstrate how to fill out the [online form used to submit data](#)** to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Refer to the sample article and completed model form (student packet, page 5), if needed. Ask students to wait to fill out the online form until their group has held a preliminary discussion.

Lesson: 30–60 minutes

1. **Students analyze and discuss their article(s).** The Recorder documents their findings and fills out the data collection form provided in the student packet (page 4).
2. **The group creates a summary** of their event(s) that addresses the “article comparison” questions in the student packet (page 7).
3. **Students double-check** their group’s data collection form for accuracy, then submit findings using the History Unfolded [article submission form](#).
4. **Each group shares their predictions** and findings with the class. As they do, students should complete the charts in their packets (page 8) using data for events from the different group presentations.
5. **Based on information** presented by each group, draw conclusions about the local community’s access to information about the Holocaust.
 - a) Did the local paper report on some events but not others?
 - b) What titles were chosen for headlines and where were the articles placed in the paper? Did any particular words/phrases within the article stand out to you?
Why do you think these titles, words, and article placements were chosen?
 - c) Were you surprised by what you found? Why/why not?
 - d) What non-Holocaust related events were deemed important by the local press, and how might this have influenced local community responses to the Holocaust?
 - e) What role should the press play in the American response to persecution and violence against groups today?

Close: 10 minutes

1. **Student Reflection**
 - a) Do you think the news media in your community was representative of news media in the rest of the country? Why or why not? What other information might you need to answer this question? (Students may use the project’s database to compare your community newspaper’s reporting with that from other newspapers during this time.)
 - b) What are the implications of this conversation for us today?

EXTENSIONS

1. **Investigate news reporting** on persecution of civilians and threats of mass atrocities in regions such as Burma, South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Syria, as well as how Americans are responding to events in these regions today.
 - a) What information is available to Americans about events as they are happening?
 - b) What does this news tell you about America's response to these atrocities?
 - c) How does access to information influence our response to atrocities today?
 - d) What other issues are getting more coverage?

Students may illustrate responses to these questions visually, creating posters or comic strips illustrating their conclusions.
2. **Create a 3–5 minute video** to reflect upon the students' discoveries. Students may want their videos to include:
 - a) A summary of their initial predictions vs. actual findings
 - b) Other interesting information gleaned during the research process, directly or indirectly related to the original topic
 - c) Relevant oral testimony of Holocaust survivors, other victims of genocide, and/or reflections by fellow participants in History Unfolded
 - d) Related images
 - e) Connections to current events
3. **Write "Letters to the Editor"** regarding media coverage of both the Holocaust and/or current world atrocities, encouraging local community awareness of events.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Breitman, Richard, and Alan Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Breitman, Richard, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew*.
New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.

Feingold, Henry L., *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust*.
Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

Gurock, Jeffrey S., ed. *America, American Jews, and the Holocaust*.
New York: Routledge, 1998.

Hamerow, Theodore. *While We Watched: Europe, America, and the Holocaust*.
New York: Norton, 2008.

Leff, Laurel. *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lipstadt, Deborah. *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945*.
New York: Free Press, 1986.

Neufeld, Michael J., and Michael Berenbaum, eds. *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?*
New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Ross, Robert W. *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews*.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.